United Nations A/C.3/55/SR.23

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
6 November 2000

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 23rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 13 October 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gittens-Joseph ..... (Trinidad and Tobago)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 110: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)* (A/55/41, A/55/162-S/2000/715, A/55/163-S/2000/712, A/55/201, 297 and 442, A/55/467-S/2000/973)

1. **Mr. Regmi** (Nepal) observed that, thanks to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children's rights had been given priority, children's education and health care had improved and there had been changes in law, policy and practice in many countries around the world. The relevant United Nations bodies had also done laudable work.

2. In Nepal, where children under 18 comprised over 50 per cent of the population, the Constitution and legislation gave broad protection to children's rights. The binding provisions of the Convention were being incorporated into its legal system; an action plan for child development had been formulated; a Ministry of Children had recently been established; and juvenile benches had been set up in all district courts. Free education was provided for children. Moreover, in line with the recently adopted International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 concerning the worst forms of child labour, Nepal had strict laws prohibiting the employment of children under 14. It had also supported the conclusions of the 1996 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Third Ministerial Conference on the Children of South Asia.

3. Despite all those efforts, however, Nepalese children, especially in rural areas, still suffered from poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy, and were generally at risk. The infant and child mortality rates were very high with many dying of preventable diseases. One third of the children did not attend school. With those realities in mind, the Government's current five-year plan, integrating the protection of children into national development, promoted their rights in general and especially those of handicapped children, street children and children in difficult circumstances. Non-governmental organizations and civil society had also been encouraged to make the public aware of the laws protecting children.

4. It was of deep concern to Nepal that children were caught up in armed conflicts in as many as 50 countries. In May, his Government had hosted the Asia-Pacific Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers; the brutal practice of involving children in combat had to stop. In Nepal, no one was subject to military service until the age of 18. Nepal also condemned the crime of trafficking in children and their sexual exploitation.

5. During the Millennium Summit, Nepal had signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography. The two instruments, once put into effect, should go a long way towards improving the situation of children.

6. **Mr. Francis** (Jamaica) said that the special session of the General Assembly in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children would provide an opportunity to review the progress made since the Summit and would set down clear goals and directions for further progress. There were emerging challenges to the many goals of the Summit that demanded immediate attention. Indicators that more clearly defined the needs of children, particularly with regard to health services and education, were urgently needed.

7. Jamaica had recently signed both optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict would undoubtedly enhance the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and give impetus to the valuable work being done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on international standards for the protection of children in times of conflict. Children, more than any other segment of the population, suffered from every aspect of war. The use of children as combatants and the mass of displaced or refugee children demanded urgent action. The Security Council's attention to the issue was a welcome development: its adoption of resolutions incorporating child protection into peace agendas and peacekeeping mandates would greatly improve the security of children, as would resolutions condemning impunity for violations of child rights, or the illicit flow of small arms, and natural resources that exacerbated conflicts. However, Jamaica believed that the best protection for children would be to prevent conflicts from arising in the first place, by addressing the root causes, among which were poverty, underdevelopment and social and economic inequalities.

8. Addressing poverty and deprivation in the family would also be the key to curbing the practices of child labour, child prostitution and the sale of children. The structure of the family must be strengthened and a healthy economic environment that facilitated stability in the household must be fostered.

9. The protection of children began with their empowerment, with education to ensure that they were equipped to take their places as productive citizens in a globalized world. With that in mind, Jamaica was working towards compulsory school attendance, with a view to improving literacy levels significantly by the year 2001. It had also sought to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child by focusing on legal and policy reform, enforcement of laws and policies, and the strengthening of the institutions in charge of the children's agenda. The Government was currently preparing a charter of fundamental rights that would fully incorporate the rights of the child into the Constitution.

10. The efforts of the Group of Eight, the Conference on War-Affected Children held in Ghana by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the recent International Conference on War-Affected Children held in Winnipeg were heartening indications of the international community's growing commitment to the rights of children. Currently, Jamaica was hosting the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policies in the Americas, the last of a series of regional meetings that were part of the review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children. For the first time, children had been invited to participate, as a way of highlighting the need to involve them in decision-making. The final declaration setting out the conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting would make a contribution to the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly.

11. **Ms. Farhâdi** (Afghanistan), noting that Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) had been a landmark for the cause of children affected by armed conflict, observed that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had not been fully implemented, either through negligence or lack of resources. Governments must work with the United Nations system and with international and non-governmental organizations to protect children's rights. Civilians constituted 90 per cent of the victims of conflicts worldwide, a large proportion of them women and children.

12. In the armed conflict now being imposed from the outside on Afghanistan, the participation of non-Afghan combatants, most of them young extremist students, some of them mere children, recruited by Pakistan from its theological schools, was common knowledge. The General Assembly itself had recognized that foreign military personnel were being provided to the conflict in Afghanistan (resolution 54/185, para. 7), and the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights in document A/55/393-S/2000/875 (para. 27) had confirmed the presence of thousands of such non-Afghan fighters alongside the Taliban. The use of child soldiers by the Taliban mercenaries with the direct collaboration of the Pakistani military was a serious crime against children and against the Afghan population. The imposed war had also victimized displaced or refugee children and subjected children to ethnic cleansing, leaving all the survivors traumatized. There would be no military solution: all outside forces must immediately leave Afghan territory in order to allow the Afghans to settle their problems through dialogue.

13. **Mr. Sangaré** (Mali) said that his Government had made the promotion and protection of the rights of the child a national priority by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and by elaborating a national plan of action that addressed the rights of the child. The establishment in 1997 of a Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family had given impetus to a number of achievements in the field. National legislation — including the Penal Code and the parental, marriage, custody, labour and social welfare laws — had been brought into line with international norms; and new laws had been adopted governing child labour, street children, delinquent children, children in difficult circumstances, the justice system for minors, and compulsory school attendance. The public had been made aware of the rights of the child through the wide distribution of the text of the Convention, in various ethnic languages as well, through television and radio broadcasts and theatre performances, and in connection with the annual observance of the Day of the African Child and the annual holding of a child's parliament allowing children to make their concerns known to the authorities.

14. Following to the World Summit for Children, access to basic medicines and immunization coverage had improved in Mali, where most of the population lived far from any health centre; hundreds of pre-school institutions had been set up and thousands of teachers had been trained; and a number of child-welfare institutions had been established or upgraded. Furthermore, his Government was planning to adopt a code for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child and a family code as a way of fighting poverty and social exclusion, and was instituting legal reforms that would restrict the market for pornography, alcohol, drugs, prostitution, trafficking in children and child labour. Mali hailed the cooperation it had received from Côte d'Ivoire in repatriating hundreds of Malian children who had been forced to work on plantations in that country.

15. Having just established a national committee to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action of the World Summit, the Government intended to work closely with associations and United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF, that were active in dealing with problems of child survival, development and protection. It would remain vigilant with regard to destructive practices such as the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography and the use of children as combatants in armed conflicts. Children belonged in school, and the Government intended to make education the heart of its strategy for peace and sustainable development. Welcoming the adoption of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Mali supported the conclusions and recommendations of the recent conferences on war-affected children and of the Millennium Summit, while looking forward to the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on children.

16. **Ms. Gligorova** (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) stressed the importance of international activities, particularly within the United Nations system, to promote the rights of children. Ten years after adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international community should reaffirm its commitment to meeting the goals of that Convention. Success would depend on addressing the major challenges facing the world: poverty, war, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, whose victims were first and foremost children. Despite progress on the national, regional and international levels, as well as within the United Nations, much remained to be done to ensure a stable future for the children of the world. In that context, she supported the Security Council's decision to include war-affected children and their rights in its mandate and welcomed related Security Council resolutions as an important commitment to the protection of children during armed conflicts.

17. In the region surrounding the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the situation had improved somewhat after the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, which had posed a serious threat to the stability and security of the Balkans. Her Government had provided shelter for more than 300,000 refugees, mostly women and children, under very difficult circumstances and she stressed the indispensable nature of the assistance provided by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society in helping children who had experienced mental and physical hardship and in providing medical help and educational facilities. Economic and political instability, continued conflicts in neighbouring States and the effects of sanctions imposed on some areas of the region continued, however, to hinder full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18. The United Nations was the appropriate forum for evaluating progress made in the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular those of children; the international community could be proud of the impressive progress made in those areas. Her Government was reviewing its legislation with a view to ensuring conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, had established an Ombudsperson for children's rights and would soon sign the optional protocols to the Convention. A national commission had also been established to ensure the implementation of the National Action Plan for the effective protection of children's rights as provided for in the Convention.

19. The Third Committee's work played a key role in focusing attention on the need to create conditions which would allow children to become healthy, well-educated citizens by eliminating the root causes of violations of children's rights, such as poverty. Her delegation therefore fully supported the holding of a special session of the General Assembly in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children and would participate actively in the preparations for and work of that special session. She hoped that action-oriented resolutions adopted by the Committee during the current session would influence the international

community, in particular the United Nations, to work much harder to protect children's rights guaranteed in the Convention and its two optional protocols as well as in ILO Convention No. 182.

20. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala) recalled that Guatemala had been one of the first States to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child and said that the two optional protocols to the Convention, signed by the President of Guatemala during the Millennium Assembly, had been milestones in the area of children's rights since the Convention itself. That renewed commitment would assist efforts to harmonize legislation with those international instruments. Although there was no longer an internal armed conflict in Guatemala, he recalled that his country had experienced first hand the effects of such conflicts on children. With regard to trafficking in children, he expressed the hope that the relevant optional protocol would assist in eliminating that scourge and said his Government would continue to support the work of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and give due attention to the recommendations made by her during her visit to Guatemala.

21. His Government continued to harmonize its legislation with the Convention and to devise a policy based on the goals of the World Summit. Since 1996 an action plan for street children and adolescents had been developed and in August 2000 the Presidential Human Rights Committee an action forum had been convened in order to implement the plan. The National Commission against Child Abuse, which included governmental and non-governmental organizations, was working to focus attention on youth at risk and had undertaken projects to prevent as well as treat and investigate child abuse; for example, in 2000 a telephone helpline had been created for the reporting of child abuse and family violence. In implementation of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, an ad hoc commission had been created to coordinate the development of a national plan to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

22. It was important that the omnibus draft resolution on the rights of the child currently before the Committee contained a number of new subheadings, including such matters such as family relationships, education, health and freedom from violence. The protection of the rights of the child would require the concerted efforts of Member States and the international community in achieving the common goal.

23. **Mr. von Kaufmann** (Canada) said he regretted that, despite the Millennium Summit Declaration affirming the international community's duty to uphold the rights of all the world's people, particularly children, the tragic reality was that children continued to suffer grave violations of those rights. It was therefore appropriate that the issue of children's rights had assumed a high profile in the United Nations and other international agencies. A major focus would be the special session of the General Assembly in 2001 for follow-up to the World Summit for Children. His Government was participating actively in the regional preparatory meeting of the Americas and his delegation would play an active role in the discussions in the plenary Assembly in November 2000. In that context, he expressed his delegation's strong support for the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations agencies in ensuring that all children received the best possible start in life and that the rights of the child were integrated into all relevant United Nations programmes.

24. Some of the most shocking violations of the rights of children resulted from armed conflict and a number of important steps had been taken to combat that tragic phenomenon. Canada had been the first country to ratify the Optional Protocol related to the involvement of children in armed conflict. It had also ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court — a crucial instrument for the elimination of impunity for gross violations suffered by children in periods of conflict — and had been the first country to introduce comprehensive implementing legislation, enacted in June 2000. His delegation had welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1314 (2000) concerning war-affected children and, in April, in partnership with Ghana, Canada had co-sponsored the West African Conference on War-Affected Children. The Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children provided the impetus for efforts in the region, and Canada was committed to following up the plan of action.

25. With a view to building on those commitments, Canada had hosted the International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg, Canada, in

September 2000, and he expressed appreciation for the support of the 130 participating Governments and the United Nations and its relevant agencies. The commitments flowing from the conference should contribute to concrete actions in that area.

26. The commitments of the World Summit for Children 10 years earlier, like those embraced by the international community at the Millennium Summit, represented some of the most urgent unfinished business facing the Organization. He pledged his delegation's full support and cooperation for the efforts of all Member States in tackling that crucial agenda.

27. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child had achieved near universal ratification and the General Assembly had adopted two optional protocols to that Convention, the dire state of the world's children required that national and international legal instruments must be implemented on the ground. In particular, Governments must address the issues of extreme poverty, environmental degradation and population explosion, which were among the causes for trafficking in children, child prostitution and child pornography.

28. He noted that Bhutan had been among the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, without reservations. As a result the Marriage Act had been amended with the interests of children and women in mind, particularly in the areas of child custody, and the legal age for women to marry had been raised from 16 to 18. The section on rape had also been amended with adequate compensation for victims and strict penalties for offenders. Child labour had been prohibited since 1994 and a draft juvenile justice act aimed at rehabilitating young offenders was under consideration; a special juvenile centre, with facilities for learning trades, had also been established.

29. Since over 40 per cent of the Bhutanese were children under 15, more than 20 per cent of the development budget was earmarked for social services, particularly health and education. The primary enrolment rate was currently about 70 per cent, the objective being universal primary education; a school for the blind and disabled had been created, a youth fund had been set up, and a division for youth and counselling services had been established within the Education Department. Female teachers and counsellors were required to advise girls against dropping out of school, and girls were informed of career opportunities and health care available to them. Universal child immunization had been achieved in 1991. In addition, non-governmental organizations were active in the field of children's rights. Bhutan was also waiting for its initial report, submitted in April 1999, to be considered by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

30. **Ms. Aicha** (Niger) expressed concern at the plight of children in the world: increased trafficking in children in Africa, the high proportion of children amongst displaced persons, poverty and hunger, sickness and violence as a result of armed conflicts. The international community must do everything possible to protect children's rights and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

31. Despite chronic institutional and financial problems, her Government, since ratifying the Convention, had endeavoured to implement its provisions. The Constitution of July 1999 had recognized many children's rights; national and regional children's committees had been created; an office responsible for the well-being of children had been created in the Ministry of Public Health; special courts had been created to deal with minors; and national vaccination days had been organized in an effort to eradicate polio. Noting the serious threat to children posed by HIV/AIDS, and the Convention's provisions regarding children's right to health care, she called on the international community to provide additional funding to developing countries in order to ensure adequate health care for children.

32. In education, a group had been created in 1996 to promote basic education for girls. In rural areas, however, parents hesitated to enrol their children in school, which they saw as a source of acculturation; in addition, the curriculum was not really adapted to the needs of the children. In an effort to promote children's rights, every year an African Children's Day was organized to increase awareness of children's needs.

33. Strengthened international cooperation was necessary to combat the many scourges, such as poverty, illness, conflict, illiteracy and hunger which afflicted children. Niger had ratified the Convention and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and hoped that the special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the World Summit for Children would be a source of innovative and

courageous strategies to improve the lot of the world's children and guarantee them a decent life.

34. **Mr. Nolaki** (Togo) paid tribute to the work of the United Nations, and particularly UNICEF, for its efforts on behalf of children. Some progress had been made since the World Summit, particularly in the fields of health and education. Children's rights continued, however, to be undermined by poverty, disease and insecurity. Each year, 12 million children died from preventable diseases or HIV/AIDS, 250 million were exposed to child labour, and 110 million — mostly African — did not attend school. In sub-Saharan Africa, school-enrolment rates were even lower than those recorded in 1980. Increasing numbers of children also fell victim to armed conflict, as revealed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/55/163-S/2000/712).

35. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had expressed concern in her report (A/55/297) at the scale of child trafficking in West Africa particularly. As part of its efforts to combat that scourge, the Government had participated in a number of subregional initiatives. A campaign to raise awareness of child trafficking had also been carried out with support from non-governmental organizations. Moreover, a national committee had been established to monitor implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and legislation had been promulgated to prohibit female genital mutilation and to outlaw the employment of young children. The Government was also cooperating with UNICEF on health, clean-water and food programmes, and on efforts to promote education for girls.

36. **Mr. Bwakira** (Director, New York Liaison Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that of the 22.3 million refugees in the world, some 10 million were under the age of 18. The protection of the rights of that particularly vulnerable group constituted a policy priority for UNHCR. The situation of refugee children on the ground remained grave. However, important developments at the international level revealed growing concern for their plight. Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000) had placed war-affected children (many of whom were also refugees) squarely on the international political agenda, as had various international conferences held in the past year. The adoption by the General Assembly of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child represented a further milestone in the development of international protection for children. It was to be hoped that a prohibition of the voluntary recruitment of soldiers under the age of 18 would follow in due course. UNHCR was, moreover, encouraged by the increasing inclusion of child-protection concerns on peace agendas and peacekeeping mandates.

37. The Office used the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in addition to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as a normative frame of reference for action relating to refugee children. Five key areas of concern were currently being highlighted, namely: the separation of children from their parents or primary care-givers; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; education (including at the emergency phase); and adolescents — a long-neglected "invisible" group. UNHCR worked on refugee children's issues through its headquarters in Geneva, as well as through five regionally based child policy officers and advisers. It also worked in cooperation with other United Nations agencies, Governments and civil society. The successful reunification of some 62,000 Rwandan children in the Great Lakes region between 1994 and 1999, for instance, had been the result of close collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Office was currently seeking to mainstream refugee children's concerns within the work of the organization. Training and capacity-building of staff and partners was another important area.

38. **Mr. Husain** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)) said that national policies and programmes should be tailored to ensure that children enjoyed their right to a safe, moral and stable family environment. International, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations had an important role to play in furthering that right. Justice for children was a fundamental concept meriting further consideration, for it was on its proper administration that lasting peace depended. The Eighth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference — held in Tehran in 1997 — had called upon OIC member States to adopt every measure to address the needs of children victimized in wars. OIC would continue to work with its member States, the United Nations and non-

governmental organizations to promote unconditional and unhindered access of humanitarian relief for children victimized by armed conflicts in Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Kashmir, Somalia and elsewhere. OIC had called on its member States to prevent children from becoming involved in armed conflicts, and to provide for their personal safety in the event of such conflicts. OIC would also be interested in working with its partners to develop a regime of penalties for violating children's safety and rights in situations of armed conflict.

39. OIC recognized the need for States to provide an enabling environment for a healthy family structure as a preventive measure for societal ills such as the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It also welcomed the focus by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on the connection between domestic violence and commercial exploitation (A/55/297). OIC was committed to assisting its member States in the post-conflict rehabilitation of children, particularly of young girls who were often the victim of sexual violence and exploitation. The international community had a legal and moral obligation to provide children with justice, peace and opportunity in the interests of a brighter future and a more stable world. OIC was committed to working with the United Nations to that end.

40. **Ms. Santos-Pais** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), said that the international community's support was a great encouragement to UNICEF in its efforts to promote the universal realization of the rights of children. The agency was present in more than 160 countries, including in unstable environments — namely before, during and after conflicts. Staff lives were put at risk, but UNICEF remained committed to its mission. The forthcoming special session on children would provide a unique opportunity for making a real difference in children's lives. The international community should prove its shared commitment by ensuring that the special session became a landmark in the promotion of children's rights at all levels, as well as a catalyst for the universal realization of those rights.

41. At the current session, delegations had done well to stress the need to ensure synergy between the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and also to emphasize the importance of the recently adopted optional protocols to the Convention. It was, indeed, desirable to achieve the entry into force of those instruments before the end of the year, and their universal ratification by the special session. Moreover, it was vital to further build upon the momentum that had led to the adoption of those instruments and to continue to display the determined leadership that was essential to ensure the protection of the rights of children worldwide.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.